

RE: length of posts

Von: **Wright, N.** (nw78@leicester.ac.uk)
Gesendet: Dienstag, 10. November 2009 21:22:22
An: kevin galalae (kgalalae@hotmail.com)

Hi Kevin,

I hope you don't mind but I have forwarded your message to the Course Director as I want you to know that the concerns you raise are taken seriously. I'm sorry that you have had such a negative experience at Oxford - quite apart from anything else it sounds like it has been extremely stressful which can't have been fun, especially from a distance.

I understand your comments about the drawbacks of having to keep posts within word limits and it is not always convenient - the complexities of IR don't always lend themselves to 400-500 word bursts. The point is really a practical one. In the virtual environment it is easier to absorb ideas and arguments in shorter chunks. As far as the ideas themselves are concerned, the forums are a free space where students should (and I hope do) feel able to express themselves without hindrance (within reasonable limits of politeness etc). Disagreeing, debating, challenging and responding in kind are the name of the game. If ever you felt that you were not able to do this, I hope that you would tell me straight away - and I like to think that you would.

I hope this goes some way to addressing any concerns you may have and you know you can contact me any time in any case.

Best wishes and I look forward to our next encounter on the discussion forums!

Nick

From: kevin galalae [kgalalae@hotmail.com]
Sent: 10 November 2009 15:26
To: nw78@leicester.ac.uk
Subject: length of posts

Hi Nick,

I appreciate your comments and directions. What I am about to say is based on painful recent experience and not on the way you have approached the postings in this course.

The requirement that we post within 400-500 words, while well intended, has some unpleasant consequences: (1) it forces brevity and not all subjects are well served by brevity, (2) brevity results in either point format posts or out of context isolated points, and (3) in order to avoid posts that are devoid of necessary qualifications and/or avoid posts that focus on one isolated point within a grand context, the discussion becomes myopic. This being the case, the ensuing discussions within forums that require strict adherence to a word limit become either myopic or superficial.

A different issue is that the length of posts is often used as an excuse to control the content of posts - this, at least, has been my experience. This past summer I took an online course at Oxford and ended up being kicked out of the course because the tutor did not like my socio-political ideas and ideals and, eager to get rid of me, instigated other students with equal axes to grind to complain about the length of my posts. I took issue with this and the ensuing exchanges revealed that the true reason for complaining about the length of my posts was my socio-political coloring. In other words, the tutor and a few students sought the only legal way to silence me. The university then used that heated dialogue to indict me of having breached netiquette so as to have grounds to expel me from the course. Having fought my expulsion from the course for four months at several levels of adjudication (from the tutor's decision all the way to the Proctors' office), I am soon to launch legal proceedings against Oxford and am also in the process of referring the case to the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The Panel the Proctors' office tasked with rendering a last judgement found the department of continuing education's decision to remove me from the course to have been "disproportionately severe" but did nothing to address the prejudice and double standards behind the decision or to bother with redress.

The point I am trying to make in telling you about this is that I take my right to free expression and to protected academic discourse very seriously. So if my socio-political ideas and ideals should elicit complaints from other students or dislike on your part, I wish to be informed about this early, openly and sincerely. I have no taste for a repeat of the Oxford experience and no energy and resources to fight on two fronts. As long as I know the truth and I know it early, I can withdraw from the forums and allow the prevailing opinion to dictate the dialogue. I may even decide to withdraw from the program altogether since I cannot stomach

Please do not take this as dissatisfaction on my part with either your approach or your style. On both counts I could not be happier. This is simply a measure meant to protect me from a repeat of the Oxford experience. I deem it necessary since institutions in the western world (and Britain is particularly bad in this respect) have a tendency to control the discourse by covertly or indirectly silencing those who do not sing from the establishment's note sheets.

Being from Eastern Europe I have radically different views from Western Europeans and North Americans, but I have no intention of allowing anyone to deny me the right to freely express my ideas, ideals and values. This is vitally important in a world where consensus not force is supposed to be the way to run the world. And consensus reached in the absence of dissenting voices is no consensus at all; it is at best manufactured consent and at worst censorship.

Warm regards,

Kevin Galalae

Subject: Re:
To: kgalalae@hotmail.com
From: nw78@le.ac.uk
Date: Tue, 10 Nov 2009 08:27:17 +0000

Hi Kevin,

Thanls for your message and I hope the feedback helps.

I hope you don't feel it is too much "weaknesses". As you correctly say, you engage with the topics with great passion which is never bad. I suppose the trick (which we all need, I should add) is to channel the passion within clear well-presented arguments which you more often than not do.

As regards length of postings, the key thing to remember with the online forum is that as a reader there is only so much we as readers can absorb and the 400-500 word length is about the optimum. The validity of the content is not the question, really just the format. It is particular to this type of learning environment so just think of it as an additional skill - again one which all of us, staff and students, have to learn. (I still get it wrong at times!)

Finally, regarding text critiques, the skill we are working on is really the ability to read journal articles which often tend to be about the length of the Huntington, and pinpoint the key arguments as concisely as possible. The skill is to know what to include and what not. I'll have a look at e-tivity 5 as soon as I get back to my computer and answer the specifics of your question then.

Thanks for your messages - the feedback you all give me is invaluable. And as ever thanks for all the great contributions on the discussion forums.

Best wishes and glad you're all feeling better.

Nick
Sent from my BlackBerry® wireless device

From: kevin galalae <kgalalae@hotmail.com>
Date: Mon, 9 Nov 2009 21:28:59 +0000
To: Nick Wright<nw78@leicester.ac.uk>
Subject:

Hi Nick,

I acknowledge receipt of your comments on my e-tivity 3 and wish to thank you for the thorough analysis and fair evaluation you have rendered. The same goes for the previous e-tivity. You have a very keen eye and have already unveiled all my weaknesses: (1) tendency to lapse into polemical style, (3) sweeping statements and assumptions, (3) long postings. I promise to actively curb these tendencies and address the weaknesses as best I can. To my defence I can only invoke the passionate nature of my personality and the equally passionate nature of the culture that has shaped my personality. Unlike the Anglo-Saxons, we, the Latins, are not very good at hiding our subjectivity and even worse at stripping reason of passion. So please take pity on me if I shall again transgress in these respects.

By the way, I love the course and your style of directing the discussions and deepening the dialogue. You have a rare talent. Thank you.

Warm regards,

Kevin Galalae

P.S. Where is Ali? He seems to have disappeared.